

## Hearts and Minds II

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We're here today picturing what? We're picturing a 1000-year period when the world will be changed from the world that we know today. A question that automatically comes up is, if I could change the world now, where would I start, what would I do? That's a wonderful thought—changing the world—it's pretty inspiring. We're here to be inspired with the idea of that period. There are songs about changing the world. I didn't look those all up but I did find a poem that I thought was appropriate. I'd like to read that. The title is:

### If I Could Change the World.

*If I could change the world today, I'd start with hearts to light the way.  
With kindness, love, and hope to share, a world united free from despair.*

[That would be a change]

*I'd paint the skies with hues of peace where every conflict finds release.  
No hunger, pain, or fear to face; just joy and laughter in every place.  
I'd mend the wounds of earth and sea; restore the balance,*

[That would be nice]

*restore the balance, wild and free.  
With every breath, a promise made, to cherish all and never fade.  
If I could change the world, you see, I would make it bright for you and me.  
A place where dreams and love unfurl; together we can change the world.*

The author unknown. Thinking about that—that first line, *if I could change the world, I'd start with hearts*—I'd like to pick up on that today in this message. I have to confess I have used this topic once before, but that just speaks to the depths of God's Word. We can approach it different ways. Us, who have the job of speaking, we are just filters. God uses us as instruments so we can approach things and get a fresh look at it. I'm going to do that today.

Thinking about that, look at the God of the Old Testament. How many times did we read right over those scriptures and didn't see it in the first "go around". If we keep repeating things—that's one of the values of study—sometimes we just see things we never saw before. I know that's probably happened to everyone in here. Thinking of the God of the Old Testament, there were thousands of scriptures and we just read right over them. Then all of a sudden, there it was and we couldn't put it down. In a sense that changed our hearts and our thinking, our minds—on a spiritual level.

Most of us in here are old enough for that phrase *hearts and minds* to maybe ring a bell. That goes back a number of years now in history to the beginning of the Vietnam War. That phrase, *hearts and minds*, was attributed to Lyndon Johnson at the beginning of that conflict. He wanted to build a hydro dam for Ho Chi Minh; he thought he would buy him off and we wouldn't have to send troops into Vietnam. That wasn't the case, he didn't buy anybody off. That's actually where the phrase *hearts and minds* became public. The theory was that you can defeat a guerilla army by just sheer numbers, by munitions, by bombing, by everything, but if you want complete victory in a country, you have to use the indigenous population. You have to win their *hearts and minds*. That was the idea behind that. The mantra, militarily, became we have to win their *hearts and minds*. That's the way we're going to win the war. We're not going to bomb people into submission. In Vietnam that same strategy was used in Iraq and Afghanistan and we know how that went. Let's turn to Philippians 4:2. Paul used that same expression, *hearts and minds*. I don't know if you've ever noticed this before.

**Philippians 4:2** *I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche ...* (NKJV)

Depending on the blue letter Bible, you could get various pronunciations on these names but it's referencing two women who are having an argument. That's what the commentators say. Probably a doctrinal argument, who knows.

2) *continued) ... to be of the same mind in the Lord.*

3) *And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel ...* (NKJV)

We know you don't have to be much of a Bible student and read through the New Testament to see how the church then was home church. Women were very active in the early church. Continuing in verse 3.

3) *continued) ... with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*

4) *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*

5) *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

6) *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;*

7) *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* (NKJV)

So, he used that phrase in an entirely different context and intention. We are blessed to be here in 2024 at the Feast. We are a small group; we're doing what we can. We are honoring Rick's legacy by carrying on here. He actually made most of the arrangements for what we are doing here today and for the room and everything. In a sense, God is guarding our minds while we are here. That word *guarding* just means "to watch over and protect". By and through His Holy Spirit, He is guarding our minds, giving us a little break from the world. Who doesn't need that?

We had a real-life experience with that one time—how God guards and protects us and gives us a certain peace. We can understand that from what God gives us. He gives us a respite. This was in the Feast of Tabernacles context. In 1987 we were able to travel to Fiji for the Feast. It was a wonderful Feast site. I don't know whether anybody remembers—maybe our Australian folks remember. That was the year of the coup in Fiji. There were 500 people who were supposed to be at that Feast site. 250 showed up. Maybe the 250 were using good sense—they didn't want to be caught in a country being torn apart. I won't go into the whole back story but the Fijian military actually took over the government from the East Indians who they had imported earlier—maybe a century earlier—to work in the cane fields. They were the industrious people, as opposed to the Fijian people. They eventually took over the government. They got into politics—does that sound familiar? That kind of scenario. The whole point of that story is, for two weeks and that whole time, because of the coup, there was a complete news blackout. There was no news in or out of Fiji—nothing. We stayed at a Hyatt Regency resort hotel, a wonderful place. The Fijian brethren are wonderful, warm, hospitable people—we love those folks. The entire time we were in this beautiful setting with balmy 80 degrees day and night. In that part of the hemisphere, you can see the southern cross all the time. It's gorgeous at night. It was something to behold. But for two weeks, there was no input from the world at all. Nothing. It was like we were insulated from the rest of the world in this little cocoon. This ideal setting, the Hyatt Regency had a beautiful lagoon—manmade of course—crystal clear. There was no TV, news, nothing. Then we left!

There's a whole bunch of islands if you don't know Fiji. There are 300+ islands and the main capital is Suva. The international airport is in Nadi. When we left and the minute we walked into the airport, what was happening? You have TVs everywhere. I'm not kidding you; our nerves were so jangled after a few minutes because we were right back into the world. We had been protected all this time. Maybe God gave us a little glimpse of what the millennium would be like. We speculate on that. We know in the millennium there have to be changes and we can only speculate on what must be changed.

I think most of us have been around and heard different scenarios—this utopia is going to be ushered in. Then we have another scenario of semi-chaotic world where everything is upset and it takes maybe centuries to straighten out. We can speculate on that; it doesn't really hurt anything. Are there any specifics that we could nail down? I think there are. It seems like with every political cycle in this country we have this administration of change. We hear that every time. I saw a bumper sticker awhile back that said, *Reelect no-one*. I have to appreciate that. Start with a clean slate and basically that is the way the millennium is going to start—with a clean slate. That's what we want. About all politics does in this country—and I'm sure it's the same in other countries— is they just refresh our disgust with politics in general every year. I heard once, or read somewhere, that one of the fastest growing industries, at least in this country is the entitlement industry. Entitlement is just a euphemism for bribe boats. I'm not going to go there. I hope all of us speakers try to stay apolitical. We're not here to discuss all that. My wife and I said—we have a nice southern view every morning and

we'll sit there. We used to sit there with our dog but she passed away, and as soon as one of us starts with politics or what's going on, we say "Shut up, let's not do that." We know these folks are in power and they are not in charge.

Getting back to the millennium, what change will have to occur? Nothing else is going to work if these don't change. If you want a title, this is what I'm getting at.

## Hearts and Minds II

This is number two because I've used this theme before, from another angle. When you think about that, God has our hearts and minds programmed on a scale we've never seen before. We're all very much aware of what is going on around us all the time—what's going on in the country—and we can look and see what mankind has done to everything. It's a monumental mess and that is being charitable. Everything—our cities, our environment—everything. We seem to be caught in a pattern of self-destruction and it's all man made, every bit of it. It comes from the heart. It comes from human nature with Satan spurring it on, just like he did in the Garden of Eden—same thing, same system. It all comes out of man's heart—that's the source.

There are a lot of scriptures that tell us that God doesn't look on the outward man—He looks on the inward man. I started to make a list and thought I would introduce this part of the point with some of those sayings and once I got to two pages I stopped. I really can't do that. We know there's a bunch of them. Let's turn to Ezekiel because it's talking about a heart condition. Even though this is in Ancient Israel, nothing changes. It's still the same—human nature is still the same, Satan is still the same. He still uses it. We're all familiar with the book of Ezekiel; there's a lot of imagery there. If you look back in the context of Ezekiel 10—we won't do that—God is basically saying, out of disgust, He's going to send the nation of Israel into captivity. Judah at that point. That's the diaspora at that time—scattered everywhere. It's primarily a judgment of Israel's leadership in that day. By extrapolation we could apply these same principles to all leaders. Ezekiel's visions are far into the future and they encompass a lot. This is from the New Living Version. Back up in the context it says that God is speaking to Ezekiel in a vision—a deep visionary state. We're not sure what that is, but it seems to be throughout the book of Ezekiel. I have to laugh when I see that. Rick was absolutely right; you probably wouldn't believe the persecution that he endured when he started preaching the God of the Old Testament. People said, that can't be—that wasn't God, that was Christ. But when you read something like this, God can appear in any kind of state He wants. Sometimes He appears as a cloud as He did in several places. Visionary state—all kinds of things. When people say that couldn't have been God. Are you telling me that you're limiting God, saying what He can and can't do? Are you kidding? When you look at the universe out there—the creation—and you're saying God can't do whatever He wants? Manifest Himself and communicate with anybody in any way He wants? That's just crazy.

**Ezekiel 11:14** *Then this message came to me from the Lord:*

15) *“Son of man, the people still left in Jerusalem are talking about you and your relatives and all the people of Israel who are in exile. They are saying, ‘Those people are far away from the Lord, so now he has given their land to us!’ (NLT)*

So, the context there is, the people that are left in Jerusalem are the leadership, not taken into captivity. Those are the people who are left. Those who *are far away*—that is primarily the leadership—who were taken into captivity. There is a plot here is and what is going on is people are saying God took those bad leaders all away and now it’s all ours. They’re not realizing they are going to repeat the same stupid mistakes.

16) *“Therefore, tell the exiles, This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Although I have scattered you in the countries of the world, I will be a sanctuary to you during your time in exile.*

17) *I, the Sovereign Lord, will gather you back from the nations where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel once again.’ (NLT)*

*When*—future tense.

18) *“When the people return to their homeland, they will remove every trace of their vile images and detestable idols. (NLT)*

How would they do that? Because they’ve had a change of heart. They don’t do that anymore.

19) *And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them [pointing to the future]. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart ... (NLT)*

Responsive—in other words they will listen to God, they will obey God. That’s what He wants, that’s what He is most interested in. God is not interested in just handing out punishment for the sake of punishing people. That’s not what He does or how He operates.

20) *so they will obey my decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God. (NLT)*

That is, they’ll be in complete harmony and compatibility, existing between people and God.

21) *But as for those who long for vile images and detestable idols, I will repay them fully for their sins. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!” (NLT)*

I think everyone here has been around long enough that we understand the usage of the word *heart* in scripture—it just means the intellect, the will, the very core of our being—that’s what it’s referring to. I think it’s been proven scientifically there is an actual connection between our heart and emotions. You could say it’s hardwired in. That’s the

way we work. We can see that typified in many examples in the Bible—nothing new under the sun. Man's heart, his influence, under Satan, is just evil continually. That's what we do, if we choose to operate without God in our lives. That's why we find ourselves in the mess we're in. It has never changed; it's been the same mess from beginning to the end in every level of our lives. But God has taken these people to task because of their idolatry, their Sabbath breaking and all the things they were doing wrong. It's all been apart from God. Satan is right at the helm—he's running things.

When you think about it, even with Satan put away in the millennium, is there going to be any residual influence? We don't know. It's abundantly clear that God is going to have to change something. He's going to have to change man's heart—his nature—from the inside out, so to speak. We know that is a process. A process we've been through if you think about it and I'll touch on that in a minute. Interestingly enough, that process is symbolized by a physical act. Picture if you will, about how it's going to take place in the future; how it has taken place spiritually in our lives today. We might think it's strange, but that's pictured by the ritual of circumcision. We know there are a lot of references to circumcision. We've maybe heard those before. There are a lot of lessons embedded there. Let's go back to the introduction of circumcision and we'll see something as we track this through. Genesis 17, I'll be using the Literal Translation. Oddly enough it translates LORD as Yehovah throughout.

**Genesis 17:1** *And Abram is a son of ninety and nine years, and Jehovah appeareth unto Abram, and saith unto him, 'I [am] God Almighty, walk habitually before Me, and be thou perfect;  
2) and I give My covenant between Me and thee, and multiply thee very exceedingly.'* (YLT)

I know other translations say multiply exceedingly, great multitude and all that. The key terms here are covenant—you're going to see that repeated many times through the context—and an implied special relationship.

*3) And Abram falleth upon his face, and God speaketh with him, saying,  
4) 'I -- I, My covenant [is] with thee, and thou hast become father of a multitude of nations;  
5) and thy name is no more called Abram, but thy name hath been Abraham, for father of a multitude of nations have I made thee;* (YLT)

It's interesting to see when God changes names, He uses names that describe what a person is to Him. Abram was faithful, he became the father of the faithful. It also means father of a multitude of nations or a powerful multitude. Those things are far down into the future.

*6) and I have made thee exceeding fruitful, and made thee become nations, and kings go out from thee.* (YLT)

That's true, you can track that.

7) *'And I have established My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, to their generations, for a covenant age-during, to become God to thee, and to thy seed after thee;*

8) *and I have given to thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, the whole land of Canaan, for a possession age-during, and I have become their God.'* (YLT)

We know that happened in a physical sense but it will happen again in the future.

10) *this [is] My covenant which ye keep between Me and you, and thy seed after thee: Every male of you [is] to be circumcised;*

11) *and ye have circumcised the flesh of your foreskin, and it hath become a token of a covenant between Me and you.* (YLT)

You have to think about that for a second, the males don't go around exposing themselves. That's a ritual that is done and it's a personal covenant. Just like our relationship with God is personal.

12) *'And a son of eight days is circumcised by you; every male to your generations, born in the house, or bought with money from any son of a stranger, who is not of thy seed;*

13) *he is certainly circumcised who [is] born in thine house, or bought with thy money;* (YLT)

You do the same thing; to become part of the nation and covenant they become circumcised.

13 continued) *... they band My covenant hath become in your flesh a covenant age-during;*

14) *and an uncircumcised one, a male, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised, even that person hath been cut off from his people; My covenant he hath broken.'* (YLT)

In the context of the covenant, he won't be part of that covenant. He's broken my covenant. There is no personal relationship. So, we see several things. All the males become circumcised, it became a sign and became symbolic of a covenant between God and His people. We see that a number of times here and it goes on and on in this section. Remember also, when the Israelites were going into the land of Canaan, in the Joshua 5, all those males who were born were circumcised going into the land. That signified, here was a people in covenant with God going into the new land, going into the Promised Land. Over in Exodus 12—we rehearse this every Passover. Still using the Literal Translation.

*Exodus 12:43 And Jehovah saith unto Moses and Aaron, 'This [is] a statute of the passover; Any son of a stranger doth not eat of it;*

- 44) *and any man's servant, the purchase of money, when thou hast circumcised him -- then he doth eat of it;*  
45) *a settler or hired servant doth not eat of it;* (YLT)

In other words, not a part of the covenant with God. So, we see in the symbols of the Passover, there is a covenant and now there's blood involved. It's an everlasting covenant that points into the future. Later that symbolizes a circumcision of the heart and there are parallels in that symbolism. We know this is a process. In the New Testament, we'll see the physical act of circumcision is only indicative of the spiritual aspect that God has in mind. That's the way God designed it to work. It's through a process. It's the only way it works. God doesn't change that process. We're going to see that same process in and through the millennium. If you think about that spiritually, there is going to be monumental change in man's heart and mind. It has to be, it can't work any other way. God's not going to continue to let us to continue doing what we are doing, messing up everything. Then it's going to be hundreds, thousands, millions, then the resurrection and billions. In the Old Testament we saw this act of cutting off the flesh, also pictures circumcision but it symbolizes a change in the thinking of the mind. It's from the inside. It begins to tell us that clearly in Deuteronomy 10, again using the Literal Translation. If you do have a comparison, it's pretty close to what you'll find in the King James or New King James versions.

**Deuteronomy 10:12** *'And now, Israel, what is Jehovah thy God asking from thee, except to fear Jehovah thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul ...* (YLT)

There's the concept of loving God with all of our *heart and minds*—the way we think, the way we conduct our lives—is how we express our love towards God. It's not a reach to see the connection between this ritual act and the conversion process. I was an instructor at a nuclear power plant for a long time and taught engineers and all kinds of people and had to realize that most of them were probably better educated than I was. The difference—the advantage I had—I got to do the research up front. Sometimes I had those engineering kids try to correct me in class. I would turn it around on them a little bit. When you think about this whole connection, when God begins working with us, He shows us what our hearts and minds are apart from Him. He shows us that we are carnal. We didn't recognize that before. I was about 30-31 when God started calling me. Looking backward, 5 years in the military, single for a long time, I had to admit I was pretty carnal—pretty fleshly. No spiritual element without God's Holy Spirit. That's how we repent and what we repent of when we realize that. God gradually brings us along to that. We turn around—that's what repentance means—to go the other way. To stop the carnal thinking. In other words, to cut it out of our lives. Start to see the connection there? It's discarding sin in our lives. We excise it with God's help—with God's Holy Spirit. That's how God's Holy Spirit works in our lives—it shows us those things. This all started in the conversion process.

Then God becomes central to everything, doesn't He? What we think, what we do, our behavior, our thoughts, and it's usually not 100%—it changes gradually. We'll see a little



later that's what God looks at in our lives. God measures that if you will. That's why He tests us. It's a gradual process, it's ongoing. Continuing in verse 13. We know that man is going to follow the same process that we had to and that we are still going through—hopefully.

*13) to keep the commands of Jehovah, and His statutes which I am commanding thee to-day, for good to thee?*

*14) Lo, to Jehovah thy God [are] the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that [is] in it;*

*15) only in thy fathers hath Jehovah delighted -- to love them, and He doth fix on their seed after them -- on you, out of all the peoples as [at] this day; (YLT)*

When you think about all the miracles God worked for the Israelites—fabulous miracles, undeniable miracles—and what did they do? How many times did they rebel and left God? That carnality was still there. They slipped back into the idolatry. When they did that, they were showing that they didn't love God. Remember back in 1 Samuel where it talks about Israel wanted a king to be like the nations around them. God told Samuel, they aren't rejecting you, they are rejecting Me. Give them a king and I'll tell you what it's going to be like. Of course, the first one was Saul and we know that didn't work out very well. That's what happened. Verse 16, from the Amplified.

*16) So circumcise the foreskin of your [minds and] hearts; be no longer stubborn and hardened. (AMP)*

In other words, cut away what's causing God to separate Himself from you. That's what it's saying. They were a physical nation; they didn't have God's Holy Spirit to help them do that—to make those changes. Just thinking about that, sometimes we fall into this trap of saying, in the Old Testament they didn't have God's Holy Spirit so they really couldn't help themselves. That's not true—that's not the way God works. He always gives people—no matter who or where they are at and at whatever age—the knowledge to make informed choices. How many times did God work with Israel? How many times did He forgive them? Over and over. He always gives people an opportunity to make choices. I don't know if you've ever thought about it, the only species on the face of the earth that can make conscious choices is us—human beings. Animals don't do that—their choices are instinctive. They know when to eat, they can turn left, turn right, go up, go down, fly or walk—that's all instinctive. They were just physical, but they could have chosen not to do the things they did. They could have chosen to obey God. They could have chosen not to fall off into idolatry. They could have chosen to keep the Sabbath; to keep the days that God told them to, but they were rebellious. Their hearts were hardened to God.

You remember—just a quick reference—Ezekiel 21, we read this earlier, where it says, *as for those who long for vile images and detestable idols*, all the evil, vile images—detestable things we see humanity doing today. *I will repay them fully for their sins. I, Jehovah has spoken.* Sounds familiar to us, doesn't it? Let's turn to Jeremiah 9, there's an interesting prophecy. It's the account where Israel fell into rank idolatry. What is the

context? Notice the context. I'll use the New Living Translation here. An interesting prophecy then, now, and in the future.

**Jeremiah 9:25** *"A time is coming," says the Lord, "when I will punish all those who are circumcised in body but not in spirit—  
26) the Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, the people who live in the desert in remote places, and yes, even the people of Judah. And like all these pagan nations, the people of Israel also have uncircumcised hearts."* (NLT)

All evidenced in the things they were doing, evidenced in the idolatry, the Sabbath breaking—everything they were doing. He is lumping Israel—primarily Judah in this context—with the Gentile nations. He's telling them that you're no better in His eyes than the nations around you. You remember later on when the Jews scornfully looked at everybody who wasn't circumcised as "unrighteous heathens"? They took that one physical sign, because as we'll see, the Jews took that one thing and made a religion out of it. That was their main doctrine. They didn't differentiate whether that was physical or spiritual. The whole record of Israel goes on proving they were uncircumcised in heart and that's where the real problem was. That's where man's problem has always been. They didn't love and obey God. They were rejecting God in their disobedience. We have so many lessons from the Old Testament to learn that from. God says the circumcision of the *heart and mind*, as we understand it, spiritual circumcision is far more important than physical circumcision. God is going to use the same process—He's going to change the *heart and mind*. He's going to cut those things away that are disobedient to Him. Let's go to Acts 15. Here in Acts 15, the question of circumcision became a major issue. James, as we know, had to make a determination that they wouldn't lay this ritual or this ceremony—physical circumcision—on the converts in the then fledgling church. Because that physical act they knew had served its purpose in the Old Testament. It symbolized a covenant between God and His physical people, but now it's spiritual circumcision of the *heart and mind*. A physical ritual has no spiritual application—it doesn't work that way. So the Gentiles coming into the church at that time didn't need to do that. Paul knew those Old Testament scriptures—he knew it was there. He had to constantly deal with and counter that legalistic attitude of, *you have to be circumcised or there's no salvation for you*. It's one thing to love God and His laws, it's another to make a physical thing a law unto itself, which is what the Jews were doing.

We have another example in Romans 1. We have an example here where Paul dealt with this. It's not hard to see what Paul was up against in Rome. There's a strong contingent of Jews there—probably well to do, although there were also slaves—a mixture of people, like there is today. We know this is a familiar chapter. After his salutation, he goes on and says to take a hard look at the so-called enlightened society they found themselves in. "You better take a look at this." Paul is saying. They had the pagan mythology, the philosophy, all that intellectual vanity they had. Sounds kind of familiar today. They had a whole bunch of attitudes flying back and forth amongst themselves. The main focus I'm heading for is in chapter 2, but this is the last part of chapter 1. If you ever want to, go through chapter 1 and compare it with Galatians 5—

the works of the flesh—it's all right there. Their carnality is brought out in the last part of chapter 1. This is from the New Living Translation.

**Romans 1:28** *Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. (NLT)*

The carnal human mind was reflected in their behavior. It's the same today—exactly the same. Like here, if we think we can ignore our Creator and do whatever we want without consequences, that's just not true. There are consequences, as it goes on to show.

*29) Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. (NLT)*

That sounds like modern day politics to me.

*30) They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. (NLT)*

What's that say to you? It says anything goes and that's what we see today. When you think about some of the things today that people expect—my wife and I talk about this once in a while, we're both getting up there—we think back 50 years ago and our parents wouldn't believe what you see in the world today. I won't mention a commercial I saw recently but it was blatant perversion.

*31) They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy.*

*32) They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. (NLT)*

Down to chapter 2. I'll still use the New Living Translation. Paul is still speaking to them.

**Romans 2:1** *You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. (NLT)*

Evidently there was a self-righteous, hypocritical, judgmental attitude cropping up between the Jews and the Greeks. Throw in some doctrinal bickering and there you go—same thing today. I'm sure the Jews then, just like folks today, have their favorite scriptures they would lay on everybody and make comparisons between themselves. They were creating all kinds of problems. We won't go to Corinthians, they're a whole other story themselves, but what did Paul talk about there? The factions, the arguments, the splits in the Corinthian church. Sometimes people do pick out their proverbial high

horse and just pick out their favorite doctrinal things and ignore what the rest of scripture says. You can't do that, Paul says. It seems like even today, once that starts in a group, it just escalates. It never goes away. Have you ever noticed that? It's like storm clouds coming through. It's stormy for a while, people don't get along, like a black cloud hanging over the church and then it passes away. Then about every 10 years, which these cycles seem to run in, there won't be anything. Then about 10 years later, here comes something else—it's always there. Don't think I'm disparaging God's people in general, I'm not. It's all human nature—everything we have to deal with.

*2) And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things.*

*3) Since you judge others for doing these things ... (NLT)*

And that's usually the case. When people have differences and start comparing themselves to one another—put one person down so I'll look better—on and on it goes. It seems to be a basic psychological function of the way we human beings operate. There are consequences as Paul goes on to say.

*3 continued) ... why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things?*

*4) Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? (NLT)*

We're the recipients of that kindness and patience of God. When He brought us to repentance. I don't know about you, but God brought us along in baby steps. We have these individuals here and it's like they were saying, I'm a Jew and you're not. I'm circumcised according to the law, you're not. Just another way of saying, who is who in the church.

*5) But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (NLT)*

When is that? In the millennium. We're all going to answer and be on our knees before Christ.

*6) He will judge everyone according to what they have done. (NLT)*

If you have a marginal reference there, you might see a couple of scriptures. These are just references. I'll go through them quickly. Psalms 62:11-12, from the New Living.

**Psalm 62:11** *God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to you;*

*12) unfailing love, O Lord, is yours. Surely you repay all people according to what they have done. (NLT)*

**Proverbs 24:12** *If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds? (NKJV)*

Paul knew the scriptures. He quoted the scriptures. He says God will render to each person according to his deeds. That's a typical response from human beings—I didn't know. Courts hear that all the time—typical excuse. It's talking about weighing the heart. It doesn't mean a physical weight. A human heart weighs 10-11 ounces depending on male or female. It beats about 100,000 times a day. What it means when God weighs a heart, He looks at it—the motives and thoughts that we have that drives us to do the things we do. That's what He is weighing. When you physically weigh something what are you doing? You gather data. God does that to us—He gathers that data. If I, for example—I have a smattering of engineering background—if I went down to the local landscaping and said I needed 5000 pounds of landscaping rock, even my simple mathematic brain can figure out, I wouldn't put those 5000 pounds in my half ton pick-up. By analogy, God wants the same thing. It's the data that is coming from the heart that He wants. He measures that, He weighs that, He tests that all the time. It's the same process. Romans 2:6. There was an element there at Rome who weren't doing these things and we read that in verse 6-7.

**Romans 2:6** *He will judge everyone according to what they have done.*

*7) He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. (NLT)*

When will we get that? Sometimes that's all we can do is hang on and persevere. Keep on doing good, honoring God, glorifying God in everything we do. Let's skip down to verse 25. There's a long discourse that's interesting. What are we coming back to here?

*25) The Jewish ceremony of circumcision has value only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile.*

*26) And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people? (NLT)*

Remember the covenant before was signified—the covenant between God and His people—that He would be their God and they would be His people. Remember that scripture?

*27) In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it.*

*28) For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision.*

*29) No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced*

*by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people. (NLT)*

On my desk I have this plaque, *Circle of Control*, I don't know if you're familiar with that—it has an inner circle, that's where I am, it has an outer circle and it's what I can control and can't control. It's a good reminder—I check it often. Inside that circle, what I can control is my attitude, my thoughts, my opinions. Outside of that, what other people think and other people's opinions, I can't control that.

Paul wasn't condemning a Jewish segment of the church; he was rebutting their hypocrisy. They were in essence acting like they were uncircumcised, even though they were converted. That's the point Paul was making with them. Let's go down to Romans 4. Still talking to the same people and he cites the example of Abraham and what does he point out in this example? Again, from the New Living Translation.

**Romans 4:11** *Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.*

*12) And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised. (NLT)*

In other words, the physical act of circumcision is not the point. Uncircumcised, Abraham still had that heart that God was looking for. He was already doing those things. He went through the symbolism to picture his obedience of doing what God wanted him to do at the time. It's like Paul uses another metaphor in 2 Corinthians 3—we won't go there—talking about a *veil over the heart*, like layers over the heart. Picturing this surgical procedure where a young child is circumcised. Its layer is removed and in a spiritual sense that's what happens to us. Those layers are like the process in our conversion. Did anyone notice yesterday in that sermon that Rick gave, where he talked about layers of blindness being taken off our eyes? It falls in with this same analogy. That's what God does to us in our heart as we are converted. We aren't converted all at once. If we try to obey God 100% or 1000% from the very beginning coming out of that baptismal pool, we would be crushed. We wouldn't make it very far at all. Speaking of those layers—that covering—what happens to our human hearts as we grow up and remain carnal, as we go through this carnal period in our life? We develop a callousness, don't we? Have you ever been around people who are really hard people? I saw some of that in the military. My dad saw some of that too. He was drafted when he was 29 in World War II. He said he was shocked—he was a country kid. He grew up in a little town in Iowa, not far from the Missouri border. He was shocked by the cruelty. He said there were no prisoners taken—they would interrogate and shoot them. They would take them outside the camp and shoot them. He was shocked by that.

God takes those things and He removes them, or cuts them away, in our lives. Not with a surgeon's scalpel, but with God's Holy Spirit acting on our hearts and minds. That's the way it works. I was talking to a good friend one time and he said, being converted—this whole process—is like being in a live classroom. You learn something every day. You learn something about yourself slowly. God helps us see those things and helps us to change and another layer comes off. I worked as an instructor as I mentioned, at a nuclear power plant and one of my assignments as an instructor was, I'd be given—I don't know if they realize or not, what is a pretty complicated piece of machinery—and we had 70 people in training staff. I was in mechanical training and we would be given a task—they had something in the plant that they were having trouble with—they would want a class on it. In fact, you didn't touch anything in a nuclear power plant unless you had training on it. That's a good way to get fired. So, I would develop a classroom part, we would have a classroom part and then a 5000 square foot building that I had training labs in with equipment. The best part to me was doing the hands-on. That's the best part for all of us. What do you think we'll be doing in the millennium? Hands-on. I don't know how much classroom we'll have; I hope we'll have a lot. I hope we can ask a whole bunch of questions. I have a few myself. We're going to see a lot of miraculous changes.

We're going to see health restored to the earth. The water, the air—everything. Is that going to be our main function? No, that's just so life can be sustained on the planet for a while. Let's go to some final scriptures in Romans 8. This is the promise from God to us who have been converted, who have been circumcised in heart and lived the way we're supposed to be living. Romans 8, I'll be using the NLT. The context, if you go back to the first part of the chapter, it's talking about God's Holy Spirit working in our minds, countering our human spirit.

**Romans 8:12** *Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. (NLT)*

You do have choices. We always do.

*13) For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.*

*14) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*

*15) So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*

*16) For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. (NLT)*

That's a change from the inside. That's the heart—a change in the heart that's taken place.

*17) And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.*

*18) Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. (NLT)*

When is that later? In the millennium. Starting when? In the millennium. Again, I hope everyone realizes this is just a process. God is interested in the end product. That's what He's constantly testing. God wants a result. He wants a product achieved through the process—a converted mind. Resulting in character from the heart. That's what God is looking for. We used to naively think—years and years ago—that God was going to somehow use these things in the physical life, all the talents and the abilities and skills we've learned in this life—that God was doing that to use those things in the millennium as spirit beings. We need to remember one thing. God's going to give us a new identity. Turn over to Revelation 2 and take a quick look at that. I like the NLT here.

**Revelation 2:17** *“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. [All those things we don't know and would like to know] And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it. (NLT)*

You know what that's telling me? We're going to get a new job—a new mission. It's not going to be what we've learned or developed in this life. That's the goal that God is looking for. That's where we're headed. That's the reason for that God-like character—the circumcision of heart—that we have and are developing now. That's what He wants to bring through to the millennium. One final scripture in Romans 8:19. I have to leave with this one. From the New Living Translation.

**Romans 8:19** *For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. (NLT)*

We should be looking forward to that too. Where we have the opportunity in the millennium to change *hearts and minds*.